Dead Men Can Tell Tales

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by amoralagent

Summary

"Do you own this place?"

Freddie followed him inside, curiously unsettled when he didn't turn the lights on as he went. It was dark, not blindingly so, but dark enough to hesitate before walking.

"Warm a girl up first, would you?" He said, more like a chide than a quip.

Freddie is invited in to a darkened room, with hopes of investigating a strange story, given to her by an even stranger man. She gets far more than she bargained for.

Notes

So, this is the Interview With The Vampire Crossover that everyone wants (yes, I also thought it was *A* Vampire, not *The* Vampire and now I'm offended). It's pretty different from the story of Louis but it has the same concept, and, eventually, it coincides with the canon of Hannibal. Just trust me, alright?

Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

Freddie Lounds, meet Will Graham. Will Graham, be nice.

"Do you own this place?"

Freddie followed him inside, curiously unsettled when he didn't turn the lights on as he went. It was dark, not blindingly so, but dark enough to hesitate before walking.

"Warm a girl up first, would you?" He said, more like a chide than a quip.

"I've been invited to ask questions," She parried, sounding less flustered than she felt. The streetlights slithered in through the windows, cutting out the shape of the low coffee table just before it collided with her shin. She rooted herself within two strides of the door as it drifted closed behind her, "Haven't I?"

He turned to her over his shoulder, profile illuminated, expression yielding nothing. His hands stayed in his pockets, disrupting the line of his suit.

"No, just the room." He conceded, pacing slowly to hover near the furthest window away, his back to her. Freddie kept her cool, and perched herself on what she could only assume was a couch, her clutch bag settled close beside her. She heard him pick up an iced drink, saw the glint of the glass: "You really want my story?"

"Why contact me?" He didn't seem opposed to her conversational dominance. Granted, it had been a cryptic phone call. Not entirely discordant in her usual slurry of leads, that's for sure.

He turned to her again, not looking *at* her, more like reminding himself of her presence, "I saw your work." He shrugged, like it was the most obvious thing in the world: "Considered you-- astute enough, to listen to what I had to say."

"Past tense. Are you reconsidering that thought?"

"No."

"Then, we'll get started, shall we?" Freddie easily took out her recorder and placed it down on the table, hitting the button without waiting any time for a refusal. The red light pinged on, and her tone sharpened, "So, what are you? A witness? Insane?" She looked around diffidently, "Afraid of light bulbs?"

"You won't believe me if I tell you." He hummed, sipping, biting back the sting. He had turned to face her but didn't move from his spot.

Freddie smiled, "I'm very compassionate, Mister Graham." He bowed his head in place of a scoff, "You're not the only stranger I've met in a darkened room. In fact, I'd count you the fifth."

"The most distant?"

"The least eager." She amended, crossing one leg over the other. All the patience of a python, this one. Will swilled his whiskey, silently amused even when he nursed his drink.

Then he stilled. Staring, at her, for a strange, ambiguous moment. Like he was thinking about... *doing* something. No noise spare the thrum of traffic.

"I'm a vampire." He declared, or-- *stated*. No pride to it. The relief that he didn't strike out radiated from her like rippling water.

"Haven't heard that before."

"Hm."

She inclined her head, getting nothing off of him. Either because he intended it, or because of the low light. She didn't like not being able to read him, "You mean it literally, I take it?"

"Yes." Will sighed quietly, finishing his drink and restless with it. He looked out to the street again, bright lights of hotels and traffic illuminating his face. From what she could make out, he wasn't disfigured- or ugly, truthfully. No reason to be hiding in the dark like he was, "I was watching you in your car," He mused, suddenly pensive, "Looking up here, watching you watching me." He peered back down, slowly, as if reenacting it. A predatory bird spotting mice. It made her skin itchy.

She had an urge to leave. She couldn't tell if her being unsettled was an intentional act, or it held part of his charm. But, among reporters of her ilk, it was a one in a million chance to stumble upon someone as obscure as they were intriguing. Realistically, it could be worth the discomfort (provided she didn't have to use the pepper spray she kept next to her lip balm) to get something good. She knew mad, and she definitely knew weird, but this was something else.

Potentially. Depended on the way she could swing it.

"You were biting your nails." Will continued, snatching her attention and keeping it. His voice was sympathetic, "I could smell the amount of perfume from seven floors up."

Then cutting, in a way she hadn't anticipated. She didn't know what to say.

Will could tell Freddie wouldn't be above seducing her clients to obtain the best story, or the most likely headline to get clicks. He'd already tested her plenty before delving even toe-deep in to the breadth of their conversation. She was mettlesome. Didn't take shit. Of course, her provocation worked too, but he didn't deign to think what would happen if she swapped tactics now.

He cocked a brow, sarcastic, "Are you trying to impress me?"

She sniffed a laugh, "The same could be said for you. It's not every day I interview a supernatural being."

"You don't believe me."

"I didn't say that."

The most she'd gotten from the phone call was his name- along with an address, and date- so, naturally, she'd done any research she could on him before going to the meet.

No employment records. No certificates. No socials. Image searches came up with old, grainy film stills of similar looking men, plucked from different points of time: blurred black and white daguerreotypes; poorly developed negatives of faces the size of needle-marks; an article byline; a crowded, overexposed photo beside a Florentine chapel. She hadn't batted an eye, and figured that there must've been plenty of Will Grahams throughout history.

However, from what little she'd seen of his face, he certainly resembled the men she'd assumed to be coincidentally similar. Distantly related, at best.

"You don't need to be so on edge, Miss Lounds." He consoled, moving closer. She didn't like the sudden bursts of observation. There were no lights on, for fuck's sake, he shouldn't be able to *see* her to *make* them. Even she hadn't noticed the tight line of her shoulders; the tension bracing for an unseen impact.

"I wouldn't flatter yourself." She said, felinely, "I'm afraid you're not the scariest man I've interviewed."

"And yet fear brushed the walls of you chest. It circles inside you, like a bird in a cage." He argued, snippy, but serenely calm. It was clear it wasn't a disposition he was born with but he adopted it all the same: "You're *frightened*." Freddie cleared her throat, convinced that her heart had jumped up into it. Will relented- partly- finally sitting down in an armchair opposite her. And all at once, he was relaxed, disarmingly so. *Normal*. He went so far as to shrug again, "I think we can both do without the facades, don't you?"

"Maybe this will be a lucky break for me." Freddie intoned, without thinking, "If you're convincing enough."

Will smiled when she couldn't see, showing teeth, "Maybe it's lucky for both of us."

He poured himself another round. Poured her one too, but she couldn't see it to know, and probably wouldn't accept it in fear of forfeiting her reflexes. Not that they'd hold a candle.

"You said you were watching me."

"Yes."

"Why? What were you going to do? Kill me and drink my blood?"

"The thought had crossed my mind." Oh. It sounded absurd. Logically, this man was lying, so she didn't expect to be stricken by it. But the sincerity was genuine by the inflection in his

voice, like the idea was a nice reverie. Stiffly, her fingers curled into her palm. Will picked up on it, "But you needn't be concerned about that now."

"You really believe this, huh?" Will just fixed her with a look, placating himself by not responding.

"We can't begin like this. Turn on the light, will you?" He gestured to the silhouetted floor lamp beside her.

"I thought vampires burn in the light?" There were sharp edges to her words, angling for a question he didn't have the right answer for. She had to feel for the light switch.

"No. I was being polite." She could tell from his voice that he was smiling, "I just wanted to prepare you."

The sound of the ice clacking, and then the light flooding the room, and then Will was *right there*, standing right beside her so suddenly it made her jump from her seat. She made a scared noise that she didn't know resided inside of her, and almost knocked over the lamp on her way. The yellow light of the room swam as it rattled.

Will only moved to take another swig, that quiet amusement touching the corners of his mouth.

"Jesus Christ." He was pale. Unearthly pale, and her fair share of mottled, milky blue-skinned corpses she'd seen flashed in her mind. Pitted by burrowing insects. His eyes were inscrutably fixed on her- the only true indication of a threat. As if he could see straight through to the back of her skull.

"I won't hurt you." It came as no reassurance. He really had scared her. Her hand quivered on the latch of her purse, and his eyes glanced down to catch it dithering, watching as she swallowed. He put his glass down, in a slow, controlled gesture, trying not to make her flinch: "I do want this opportunity. I wouldn't have wasted my time if I didn't."

Freddie snapped back to herself, dispelling the static of the room. She was surprisingly unaccustomed to being startled.

"How'd you do that?"

"As anyone would, really. I'm just *quick*." He told her, hardly apologetic about it. She got the sense that he just enjoyed unnerving people, and she couldn't blame him for it- but it was a narrow form of entertainment. Monopolising on people's distaste was enticing. She'd be hypocritical to believe the opposite.

Will stepped away from her, rounding the table again, and she noticed the drink left for her on it, amongst a couple books, pens, the morning's paper. There were clothes draped over the back of the armchair, and the bed across the room was in a similar state. The whiskey bottle was near-enough empty: it had all the classic features of someone living alone, with everything you'd need in one room, akin to a hotel or an apartment. She absently wondered what was in the fridge.

"Is that part of-- what would you call it- your abilities, then?" She asked flatly, "Being *quick*." Will wasn't looking at her anymore, and she debated moving over to the kitchen when his back was turned, in the ruse of helping herself to some ice. In spite of what she'd just witnessed. She didn't want to think herself trapped in the situation.

"I'd call it a symptom. Among other things."

"I thought vampires were more evolved than that? Immortal, even?"

"It's a condition, if that's what you want to call it. We're not impervious. Disease can't touch us, but death can, it's not the best of deals. We're flesh and blood, sure. But I'm not human. I haven't been human in three hundred years." He ruminated on that a moment, frowning, "Give or take."

"Give or take?"

Will sighed at length, "Please sit down, Freddie." First name basis, all of the sudden. She supposed that's what happened after you vaguely threaten to kill someone. She didn't move to sit back down, and he turned to her. Those abstruse eyes. When he studied her, no anonymity to it, it made his attention sit like a physical weight, "There's a drink there, if it'll calm your nerves."

Really, with the stress of it all, she could've done with a smoke break. She sure as shit wasn't drinking whatever he was offering, not when he'd poured it in the dark. This wasn't funny anymore.

"I'd rather not." Will had his hands in his pockets again, making him appear smaller and meeker than he would otherwise, and her curt tone made him turn to her properly. Like she was caught in his crosshairs.

"What can I do to put you at ease? Should we begin with the relatable things? Being born, growing up. Appeal to my humanity?" He sounded mocking but he grew drawn, mirroring both her curiosity and her distrust with a shift in his posture. Then, he moved carefully back over to the table, sitting back down and looking up to her as he took up his glass once more, brow creasing, "Or shall we begin with the end?"

"The end, being?"

"My death." God, he was good. She couldn't pass this up.

"You're not lying to me, are you?"

"I have no reason to." Will's face softened, leaning back, a picture of unassuming terror. Finally seen and heard: "I'll tell you everything."

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Sometimes, when he wandered through the field, Will would see a boy running, stick in hand, to vanish amongst the trunks. Or, someone waving from a window, their faces cut in half by the sky's reflection in the glass.

The story begins, as it should, with a death. But not his death. Not yet, anyway.

Chapter Notes

I see your endearment of Will, and I raise you: an apology. Warning for sadness.

Foster-Graham Estate, Virginia, 1791

He was trespassing. What Will had exclusively done under the cover of darkness, had become habitual enough for him to do in broad daylight all of the sudden, and, without prior consideration, he was hefting himself over the gate to walk around the grounds again. The weeds and grass alike came up to his knees, and the pollen caught on the bottom of his coat. Ivy had sprouted from the attic, and pleasantly curled itself around the front wall of the building. It smelt different. Sounded different.

Curtains still flitted at the warped glass of the windows, like bridal veil, the white stark against the dirty brick and the greying sky. The illusion of movement inside. He could only imagine the shrouds of dust that had settled on the furniture, the mould festering on the walls, considering no one else had come remotely near the property since it became destitute, let alone been in to clean it.

Will took the same trodden path through the grass that the deer did, just along the tree line. The soil was only slightly damp underfoot, but the air was stale in wait of an oncoming storm, so only crows cawed and flew from the branches when they saw him coming. It wasn't a plantation- and never had been- but the grounds were spacious enough to warrant a decent walk, most of it given up to woodland, making it seem safer, and far more private. He enjoyed the seclusion, but hesitated to let himself feel it. The weight of his own memories bored down on him within those wall, cloying, like an aroma stuck on his tongue.

Nostalgia wasn't quite the right word.

Without hunting to keep the wildlife populations in check, and no one cutting firewood, the estate now belonged to the trees. Nature had even reclaimed the house. One day, the earth would swallow it back up, and nothing would remain.

Sometimes, when he wandered through the field, Will would see a boy running, stick in hand, to vanish amongst the trunks. Or, someone waving from a window, their faces cut in half by the sky's reflection in the glass.

He often thought of what came of the people that once worked for him. The validity of their contracts as indentured servants quickly dissipated when the estate slipped through Will's fingers, and he did the best he could to keep up his end, and transport them out of the country.

They'd taught them all to read and write- despite the societal discouragement to teach those who were black- which would benefit them in the long run when agreeing on new employment. When the estate was lost, and everyone including Will himself was without a home, some went down south. Some were able to go back to Europe. Some vanished. With the education and experience they bestowed, it seemed unlikely for them to succumb to circumstance. But he couldn't know how successful it was. He'd have nightmares plagued with the thought of their backs bled raw by leather whips, tremors in their calloused hands, blinded by their own exhaustion. He hoped fate had been good to them, but knew enough to consider otherwise.

Only upon rounding the corner to the little cemetery did it occur to him, painfully, that they could be under his feet. Somewhere isolated, and alone. Their decaying, putrified bodies buried in unmarked graves.

What was better or worse? Being hidden quietly underground, or your presence claimed and identified? Everyone befell the same fate of being entirely forgotten. Either instantly, or the weather wore away the stone enough until your name was illegible.

Will could still read Molly's name on her headstone. Wally's inscribed just underneath.

They'd taken a family plot, beside the small crooked stones that had the names of her parents, grandparents, distant cousins, stablehands. After the death of Wally's father, the two of them had come back to Molly's parents. Will didn't meet her until Wally was nine, and even then, she had this sorrow in her eyes. Molly's father died that same year. Her mother not long after.

He'd seen the effect loss had on people, and seen it in himself. But it seemed to him, women had always endured, in a different way. Molly had spoken about it in regard to her mother- how she changed after the death but never once cried in front of her, definitely not in front of her grandchild.

In order to deal with it, she would pretended her husband had just taken his horse, and gone on a long, long ride. He would be back soon, surely.

And the same was true for Molly, but Will never knew the extent of her emotionality about her first husbands death. As much as they did love each other, and aided each other in both of their fears of the dark, Molly could seem forbidding. Like a book without a preface. He found himself beseeching reassurance, and hated himself for needing it. Molly was too good to him.

Still, it put strains in the relationship where there should have been none, but it was an ugly thing to talk about, so she avoided doing so, and, truthfully, the subject was never Will's to broach.

Men suffered some. Push a broken bone back in, live with the bruises, don't talk about the ones on your heart. Die in battle, or mysteriously. Or, just go out, abruptly and unforeseen, like a flickering candle in a strong wind. But women were *tortured*. They were forced to live with the pain, that loss, and be stoically strong about it in order to prioritise their children. He'd seen women consumed by illness. It was true for Molly. He'd seen them bleed, routinely; he'd watched them cry, and scream, so violently they'd be doubled over by their own grief. He'd known women to be mistreated, beaten, raped.

He didn't know how they could bear it. It was some relief Molly no longer had to.

It was a domino effect. Minds being seized, then bodies. The burden of the loss was latched on to her mother, and when she passed not long after, it hung onto Molly. All of it, all at once, unendingly. Will knew the effect it had on her, and how old feelings had reinforced themselves, to the point where all they could do is fight, then make amends, only to fight again. Molly hardly ever got angry, but her temper was volatile. It normally ended in her crying.

Will stayed by her side when she got sick. They tried everything. And when Wally caught it too, Will couldn't even resort to praying to relieve the terror. She deteriorated. Will didn't know what to do, and when she was in bed- dying- *she* was the one comforting *him*.

He fell asleep with her one night, and when he woke up she was dead.

Wally died weeks later, kept unaware of his mother's passing. For a long while, Will stopped feeling anything altogether. He was only certain he didn't deserve to live. Despite the knowledge it was nothing within his control, he felt responsible. Or guilty, simply for his inability to perform miracles.

And, strangely, he was jealous of the family's reunion in death. That was the most unsettling of all his emotions. It never left him.

Even at the funeral, he'd felt it wouldn't be right to put himself next to Molly and her son. His casket crowding theirs, not who it should be, pushy, his presence invasive, unwelcome. He felt her parents never could look at him without seeing the man he was replacing. He'd feel like that when they fought. An imposter. A liar taking the identity of a dead man.

He didn't visit the graves often, so they were riddled with weeds creeping up in unseen cracks, obscuring the engraved words. He crouched down beside the stone and leant across to pull out the intruders by the root. He laughed to himself, a mirthless, false noise, thinking about how quaint it would be to be able to clean out his mind as easily. Molly would chastise him for it, in that fond way she would. *Life isn't always a bed of roses, huh? I'd say something clichéd about thorns but, well- I know you won't appreciate it.* She would tuck a curl behind his ear, whisper an I love you, glean a sigh, maybe a tired, bashful smile just for her.

When he didn't have anywhere else to stay, or didn't want to be around anyone at all, which was more often, he'd break back in to the house through the back window and collapse drunkenly on the floor, or manage to crawl to what was left of the mothball, dust-shrouded furniture in the front room. The house was as quiet as any house of that age could be, wind whistling through, the skittering of rats and birds in the rafters. In his stupor, he'd heard the groans and creaks and mistake them for child's footsteps, on more than one occasion. Burned with a tepid mix of rage and sadness. The chairs he kept were rickety and starting to rot away through the varnish, cushions puffing clouds of dust into the air when he fell on them. Worms winding through the rosewood, and he'd feel them under his skin when he woke up in a haze, coughing and itchy, and vomit hot bile on to the dirtied mahogany floor.

She certainly wouldn't have been happy with his drinking. Fell into it a week or so after their deaths, and hadn't stopped for two years. He felt the ache too hard when he craved company, someone to help mend him again, start awake from fleeting sleep thinking a kind hand was being pressed to his forehead.

A swelling feeling kept his throat clenched as he brushed dead leaves from the top of the stone. Standing up, looking down. He didn't say anything aloud. Inwardly, somewhere far off behind his head, a niggling voice called him a coward. He considered the release of death more intensely than he normally did. Then, he released a held breath, and turned away to leave.

That night, he washed up in the local tavern. It was on the outskirts of the nearby town, half settled into the woods, and only a few horses stood tethered out front. Only a short walk, and he'd trip over just about everyone who knew him, or knew *of* him, spare the ladies of the night that drifted around. He could do without the condolences, regardless.

Will slipped into the bar unnoticed, fixed his shirt collar and his coat, the spores having flown off as he rode. His hair was mussed, face unshaven, eyes tired- looked about as rough as he felt. His typical pallor and exhaustion were usually masked by a thin, glassy veil of alcoholism, like a necessary layer to get him through his days. In that moment, he wanted nothing more than to be swaddled in unconsciousness, returned to darkness and gone away.

When the barman turned to him, he recognised him as Matthew Brown, who'd brought him inside when he passed out in the street one night, cold with rain. It seemed he knew him in turn. He came over with some kind of whiskey, pouring into a glass he placed before him.

"You're a sight for sore eyes." He smiled carefully, like he was unsure of himself. Will offered one back.

"Been that long?"

"It's only been a few days, no. I'm saying you look awful." Will actually managed to scoff a little laugh at that, scratching his beard, and shot back the drink in one go. Matthew obediently poured another.

"Bless your heart." He quipped, deciding to take the second a little slower. Not that he particularly wanted to stay aware of the curious way Matthew was staring at him, voice soft.

"How are you coping?"

"Hmm." That was enough incentive to toss the second scotch back without preamble: "I'm not."

"Would talking be a better help than drinking?" He suggested, still refilling his glass, just a bit less than last time.

"Oh. I don't know. Maybe if you knock me senseless afterwards."

Matthew's tight-lipped smile said sorry as he went back to the other end of the bar to serve beer to a group. Will thought of more than a few ways to get knocked out, eyeing the big stoic men at the back of the room, then the silhouetted figures out the window. He nursed his third, sip by sip, and weighed up his options.

In candlelight and shadow, he rubbed a hand over his face, the blood in his brain already sloshing from front to back. He was tired, but not tired enough. Slowly, he sighed, and found his mind made up.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

He was pretty certain he was only opening and closing his eyes for hours on end, until they burned hot in their sockets, and he wasn't sure if he was crying or his eyes were streaming.

When he opened his eyes again, a shadow stood up at the bottom of his bed.

Will is saved from an attacker by a killer. That same killer follows him home.

Chapter Notes

Hannibal, please keep it in your mouth for two seconds, would you, please?

With senses fuzzed over as if in a haze of smoke, Will stumbled outside, almost falling down the small step. The swimming awareness seemed to amplify his isolation, so much so that he didn't refuse one of the women wandering the streets, even when she came right up to him and slid a hand round his waist from behind. He probably would've fallen into anyone's hands, good or bad, not even for sex. Just to feel something other than the barren, booze-clogged emptiness of his own mind.

In the low light her smile made her look she could be anyone, and Will could even smell her sticky perfume past his own stench of alcohol and sweat. A horse whinnied as if struck, a glass bottle shattered loudly somewhere. Will allowed the woman hanging off of him to lean in to him, felt her hot breath against his face like a damp cloth, the scrape of his stubble against her lips when she kissed his cheek. He wasn't listening to her, her sweet words disappearing in front of her.

She was leading him-- *somewhere*, probably to the brothel or a rundown hotel, both of which would inevitably reek of a throaty, animal musk like the farthest crevice of a bear's cave. A clinging, overnight stink, intermingled with sour-smelling damp and body odour. He could already smell the waist-deep river that dissected the town in half, more like a creek, that held no life and smelled of anything that got washed up in it. If he wasn't careful it could convince his stomach to give up its warm contents.

Then, without any warning, Will was thrown up against the side of a building by two strong arms, a blade pressed tightly to the hollow of his throat. He blinked, swallowed, watched the man's shadowy face as he threatened him. The prostitute shifted behind his shoulder, kept a look out for any passers-by.

"Got any money?"

"No."

"I think you're lying to me."

"Hmm. You're welcome to check."

"You bein' a smartass with me?"

"Am I?"

"Do you want to die!"

Spit landed on Will's face, blackened by tobacco. The knife dug in to Will's skin a bit too snugly. But he wasn't all that bothered. Being murdered right there and then wasn't that unlikely, or that uncommon. Perhaps it was a fitting death, dying as lamely as he lived, at the mercy of a crudely sharpened razor. He was accustomed to being threatened with violence. After the deaths the townspeople started spreading rumours about Will. That he murdered them, that he planned to murder more.

That stopped when they all seemed to notice how happy he was to throw himself face first into fights- the clear displays of how he wanted to die more than he wanted to kill- and the insults morphed into apologies. Sympathies said with sad expressions.

Honestly, that pissed him off more than the punches.

He swayed somewhat and was quickly shoved back against the wall, the crack of his skull against the wood not exactly helping with his already lacklustre consciousness. The man kept spitting at him as he spoke, something about watches and carving up his face.

Either the woman wasn't a very good lookout, or Will was imagining someone lurking between the shadows.

A small, frightened scream of the woman, and the man lurched over Will was seized by the shoulders. It happened too fast to register. The light scampering footsteps of her running away, the sickening crack of the man's neck, the thump of his body, the slick of the blade as it caught Will as he went down. Then the rescuer, or killer, or vigilante, stood there, broad and strange and faceless, and when Will could just about think of the words to thank him, feeling the heat of blood on his neck and on the verge to bring his hand up to check it, he was being shoved back in to the wall, forcefully, and he expected a wound. And before he could breathe correctly enough to understand what was happening, teeth, as sharp as the weapon that made it, closed around the cut on his neck, and sucked.

The sensation was indescribable. Will could feel a hot drop of blood run down to the base of his throat, slowly seeping into the fabric of his collar. His palms began to clam up, and he brought them up to push the man away but ended up gripping the lapels of his coat, breathing hard, the nape of his neck and back coming out in a cold sweat.

His head lulled in the way it would before passing out. He gasped for air. Stared blindly up at the sky like it would help him. He felt light, ungrounded, heard the man drinking, imagined all the red of his blood and face, giving pigment to his organs, being drained out, leaving colourless, slate-grey insides in it's absence. His skin tingled like pins pressing in.

The grip he had on the man's coat slipped, hands and arms growing weaker and weaker, limbs feeling as if they'd disconnect and float away. He was being moved.

At the same time the man stopped- just before his awareness shut down- Will was let go, and he fell. He hit water when everything went black.

He was suspended. Sinking. Bubbles shivering up to the surface as he drifted lower. Like a shipwreck. Light filtered in, tissue-thin, cutting his body in half. His hands twitching. Pale skin glassy. Hair silky and floating. Underwater sounds like cotton wool in his ears.

Coughing. Will only found enough strength to turn his face to the side to choke up phlegm and salty water from his lungs. He'd washed up downstream on the muddy shore, like a drowned corpse, spluttering. For a minute he thought he'd died, never to be found. Alas.

People stared open-mouthed as he trudged into the tavern, still dripping wet and reeking of waste, and he almost fell in to the bar on his way round it to head upstairs. Matthew's eyes were as startled as a bird's, but he didn't refuse him the space. The place used to be an inn so there was always a spare room.

The door slammed shut behind him, and he kept having to hold onto things to stay upright. His shaky hands scrabbling against the wall, then the dresser, pulling himself free of his soaked coat, then suit jacket, then stained shirt. The clothes were left in lumpy wet mounds on the floor, dampening the floorboards.

Reluctantly, he washed his face with the stagnant but clean water left on the dresser, placing a hand on his neck. Sighing, he dipped his hand in and wiped it over the stained and cracked mirror.

The pinprick markings look like an enlarged bug bite. No swelling, but it was tender to touch, as if it might bruise. He looked at his reflection, and found it unchanged. Overtired. Cadaverous. No different from the last time he saw himself, apart from the ugly mark left on his throat from a night he didn't quite believe happened.

He rubbed at the spot until it went a blotchy, angry red.

The next few days were hallucinatory and hazy, like the last dregs of an illness wearing off, clumping together as ice cubes do when half-melted. Matthew let him have the room for a couple of days, longer if need be, with the gift of getting his clothes washed. He brought him some food whilst making a sideways comment about his eating. Well, *lack thereof.*

Naïvely, Will thought it might help him to go back to the house, perhaps comfort himself with somewhere more familiar. Happier alone, in the company of the dead. He couldn't bear to sleep in the same bed that he did when she died, her presence too strong there, so he shook out some ancient bedsheets and made a makeshift bed on the canapé sofa downstairs.

Even so, his sleep was threadbare. The uncomfortable feeling of paranoia invaded the only place he felt safe, or at least, felt like he belonged.

Accompanied him in his dreams. Nightmares, really. But nothing out of the ordinary.

It was regrettable he couldn't make out who the man- *creature?*- was. He supposed it wasn't the best time to figure it out, with the blood-drinking and all. Laughable, to think of it like that, but it made him spectacularly uneasy. He still felt *watched*.

Springs in the couch dug into his back when he laid down on it, sheets musky, made worse by his night sweats. He was pretty certain he was only opening and closing his eyes for hours on end, until they burned hot in their sockets, and he wasn't sure if he was crying or his eyes were streaming.

When he opened his eyes again, a shadow stood up at the bottom of his bed. He scrabbled up, away, only to find him unmoving. Will didn't know if he was looking at a figment, or a lover, or the devil himself. The moonlight cut behind him, and he couldn't see his face. The man was terrifyingly still: "Wh- What the *fuck?"*

"Crass." He scolded, in a voice low and unsettlingly calm. Affectless.

Was he imagining him? Will could hear his heartbeat thumping in his ears.

"What are you doing in my house?"

"I thought I'd introduce myself." He said, as if it was a perfectly acceptable reason. His was accent implacable, "I don't think we were properly introduced before."

Will's heart was like a trapped starling against his ribs, but anger broiled in him, "I don't *care* who you are, you tried to *kill* me."

"And yet, you invite death." He said it as if he knew it to be true. Will was rendered silent. The figure walked slightly round the front of the couch, that *bit* closer, pacing; his suit a dark red when the moon limned it. *He still couldn't see his face*: "I'm not intending to hurt you, Will."

"Come into the light."

"The graves of your wife and child look fresh. Did you only just get around to cleaning them?"

"Come into the light!"

And he did, with one step. His appearance was as striking as his arrival. No one Will had ever seen before. Broad, imposing. He was wearing a formal ensemble, crimson and black, cravat

and all. Hair pushed back, cheekbones scooped out of his skin, like porcelain. Lips plush, but he was still unequivocally masculine- even intimidating.

Eyes the colour of overripe cherries. Dark, like looking into a black hole that eats all light.

"Who are you?"

"The man who tried to kill you." He offered, nothing short of witty.

"You know my name."

He inclined his head, as an owl would, "Hannibal Lecter. Now you know mine." There was a quirk to his mouth, like a smile, "I also know that there is no such thing as love, without the anticipation of loss. And that you're a lonely man."

His expression remained unyielding. Will took a moment to stare. The sibilant buzz of v and s in *love* and *loss* tickling down his spine.

"Yeah, well, I don't have to anticipate it anymore."

His tongue got sharp when he was scared. Hannibal seemed nothing if not appreciative.

"Maybe not. But that despair, especially that which comes with mourning, is simply a slower way of being dead." He was right. He didn't like it, but he was right.

"I'm not against dying."

"Is that an assurance or a dissuasion? You're offended by attempts made on your life." Will wanted to scratch him.

"Emphasis on *attempts*."

"At your own hand, perhaps? I thought you would've done it by now." Will found it strange that he could make him feel things: relief, fear, curiosity. Rage. Hannibal seemed amused by it all, even when goading him about suicide, "Have you thought about it?"

"Why are you here?"

He pointedly ignored him: "You're plagued by philosophies when you do. All of those tricky 'what ifs'." Will hated feeling so *seen*. It had been so long since anyone *looked* at him, "You might think you're perceiving truth in the answers you tell yourself, but the truth lies."

He found the courage to laugh at him. Once, quickly, more of a chortle, "Did you come here to make me change my mind, Hannibal?"

"You don't want to die, Will. You just want to stop hurting."

That halted him. His chest went tight.

They stared at each other for a few long, unpredictable moments. Two men, haunted by death, caught in the light of the moon.

"I shall give you a rare gift." Hannibal continued, scanning the room, then Will's face, "A new life unlike any other. Sickness and death will never touch you again, and you'll be exonerated of the pain of it." His gaze never strayed, "A rebirth, of sorts."

"That sounds suspiciously like you're going to kill me."

"In a way, yes." He moved closer, and Will found himself not opposed to the idea. From what he'd experienced at the hands of this man, it seemed that he was ignorant to real truth. And he didn't appear to be lying, "But I can promise you, you won't die in a spiritual sense. And I always keep my promises."

There was that small expression again, like a twitch, revealing his face behind the mask: "How am I supposed to believe *you*? I watched you murder a man only a few nights ago."

"You were the reason I did so, Will. Is that not reason enough?" He was looking down at him then, as malevolent as a god. Will considered him, his vague offer, always convincing in the manner of his speech- and his rage folded over to quiet resignation. Hannibal's voice felt like a balm: "You have nothing left to lose."

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

"Your body is dying," Hannibal said, following him steadily, a smile on his face, "Pay no mind."

Hannibal makes good on his attempts, and keeps his promise.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will stood over the graves again, the moon catching his linen shirt brightly, a tilt to his head as if thinking deeply. He'd already made up his mind. But he wanted to readjust himself, like a piece of driftwood getting its bearings on a tumultuous sea. Be reminded of the jurisdiction loss has on life.

Something was going to happen, and he had the uneasy feeling he wouldn't be coming back to the house in a long time; back to them. Whatever it was, it was something new. Something completely other than getting so blind drunk the ground turned to the deck of a storm-tossed boat, and he didn't know what time of day it was. Using the excuse of grief to sully his thoughts until they congealed into a wet, moulding mass. Days escaped him, weeks, months.

They wouldn't want him living like that. She wouldn't want him living like that.

Anything would be better. It had to be.

"Have you said your goodbyes to the dirt?" Hannibal asked, his voice foreign and abrupt through the receding darkness; the curtain of night slowly peeled back to reveal the dawn sky.

Will wanted a change of skies.

"Yes."

With little to no warning, apart from the tread of his feet on the leaves, Hannibal was in front of him, and his hand held his jaw. His teeth sunk into the same wounds they'd left, a sting, branding heat on his throat.

The pain went as quick as it came, and the dizzying, draining feeling reemerged. He felt the closeness of Hannibal's form. Felt the blood. He felt fear, not the mortal, desperate kind he had before, but a cold and *deep* kind, like a metal hook was stabbed into his side and curled round a rib.

His heartbeat began to slow, thudding rhythmic and deliberately in his ears, fading out, stalling. Stuttering against his sternum like something was trying to crawl it's way out. His knees buckled. Hannibal let him go, and he fell to the ground on his back, unfeeling, his pulse drumming, pressed tight against his ear. He saw splotches of light and dark, succumbed to numbness, focused on the vague awareness of his own bleeding.

Hannibal leant over him, watched his half-blind pupils dilate and sharpen, eyelids fluttering. His skin damp and cold to the touch, hair clinging to his forehead. Hannibal sunk his teeth into his own wrist- *red on his mouth*- and Will tasted metal and warmth on his lips, cloying on his tongue, his throat working when he swallowed. With a surge of energy, he drank from the cut, locked eyes with Hannibal as his senses drifted back to the surface; only for it to feel like his bowels were being torn open, his lungs burning, all his muscles seizing at once.

Hundreds of barbed hooks, through his hands, stabbed in his legs, punctured through the meat between his ribs. Tearing him apart.

Will *writhed*. He wrapped an arm around himself as if bleeding, feeling as though he was clumsily trying to keep his organs from falling out of his body. Turning over, clawing at the wet leaves and grass and dirt between his fingers, under his nails, trying and failing to get his feet underneath him to be able to run. Blood pumped in his veins. *Hannibal's blood.* He stumbled, fell, stumbled again. Scrabbling and fleeing like a limping, helpless animal.

"Your body is dying," Hannibal said, following him steadily, a smile on his face, "Pay no mind." His footsteps were almost silent. A stick snapped. Will fell again, blood and dirt in his mouth, and desperately crawled until he couldn't gather the strength to move. He dropped onto his side, whined. Groaning once, he watched Hannibal crouch down to him in his blurry, marred vision, "You will be born anew." His voice was like a tide coming in: "But birth is always violent."

Will took a final, stuttering breath, and died. Death only passed over his eyes. Like the shadow of a vulture.

"What did you see?" Freddie queried, Will's eyes snapping to hers, "When you died?" She was scowling, looking weirdly, almost worryingly, intrigued. Will's gaze dropped down to the bottle when he sighed.

"There are no words to describe it."

"Huh. Convenient." She smiled a little, at him not with him, and wrote something on her notepad. Biting his tongue, Will idly watched her twiddle her pen between her fingers.

"Do you need another cigarette?" Her bemused offence was thinly-veiled.

"It doesn't bother you, does it?" Freddie said instead of asking, opening her bag, "I suppose you won't die from cancer. Will you?"

Will didn't offer his help as she struggled with the lighter: "That would be quite the lawsuit, Freddie."

"Hm." She scoffed, genuinely smiling around her first drag, "I guess so." He looked away when she looked at him. Car headlights cast soupy, gliding reflections across the ceiling, "Can you smoke?"

"Yep."

Freddie held out the open pack, "Do you want to?" That wasn't a proposition Will was given often. Or, wasn't inclined to take. She could tell by his surprise.

Curiously, he didn't refuse: "Just so you know, I've quit several times." He took the lighter and put the cigarette between his teeth.

She noticed his canines, sharp like a dog's. Her movements to take her lighter back were tenser than they had been.

"What about crucifixes?"

"What about them?"

"Can you look at them?" She fidgeted slightly when Will grimaced, at both her, and the cigarette.

Smoke danced in the air, lingering between them, "Yes."

"Stake through the heart?"

"Bullshit."

"Silver bullet?"

"Werewolves."

"They exist?"

He shrugged, coyly.

"Garlic?"

"Unbothered."

It was as if she was trying to catch him out. She sighed, made a point of tapping the ash off into the drink he'd previously offered her.

"...Food?"

Will smiled, "Depends on the cook." The cigarettes were too cheap and tasted stale, so Will stubbed his out on the newspaper, barely half-smoked: "It isn't insufferable to eat most things. But drinking is nicer."

Freddie cocked her head, her curly untamed hair lolling onto her shoulder, "Do you have to sleep in coffins?"

Then it was Will's turn to scoff, "I always thought it was a joke, too. Until blackout blinds were invented, I suppose." He sighed, "Beggars and choosers."

"Novel."

"Quite." He watched some more ash sink to the bottom of her glass, and met her gaze again, "Where were we?"

Hannibal checked Will's pulse, found the wounds on his neck to be gone, and scooped him up to carry him back inside. Once he'd settled Will back on the couch, the first tendrils of sunlight seeped in, and illuminated his soiled linen undershirt, scratched up, his skin underneath. He took off his coat, and placed it over him, studying his worn expression. Hardly opening his eyes, Will stared back: "You're going to kill me."

"I wouldn't have wasted my blood on you if that were the case, Will." Reverential. Will swallowed, somewhat disquieted, finally seeing Hannibal's face in the daylight. He felt *known*. In a carnal way. In a deeper sense than he had for what felt like decades.

But victims always believe themselves better than those before them. Only to find that, no, they weren't, and wind up dead like all the others. That's what he was, wasn't he? A victim?

He didn't *feel* that way.

"You seem to have a malformed belief that I convert people often." Hannibal noted, languidly moving to sit in an armchair across from him.

"Don't you?"

The answer seemed to be yes, but he didn't deny it either way, "You need to sleep, Will. Rest."

Will chose not to resist. He didn't laugh when he thought about how they really did have *all the time in the world.*

Chapter End Notes

Wakey wakey, eggs and bakey.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Bucks, and fleeing does, and merchants of furs and animal bones drifted between the pines like spirits. The nights fell warm and clouded, inky. The darkness felt underwater.

Will and Hannibal move states. And, without the want to kill, Will begins to deteriorate.

Chapter Notes

Sorry this update took so long. Sudden scenery changes and starvation are hard to write. Happy Halloween month though, we've got that going for us.

Hannibal seemed to be unmoving from his position in the armchair beside Will. He placed a bucket down by Will's head, but that was the extent of his movements, merely watched on when Will occasionally lurched over and threw up warm brown water that burned his throat-coming out of him slow and sinewy until he'd retch. The whole place reeked of acid and decay. Between loose, nausea-soaked dreams, Will saw Hannibal, in reality or in his mind, blood red, outlined by the lazy swell of dawn light. A guardian and a threat.

Vaguely, Will wondered why he was still there; how he could be so still and eerily patient. If or when he'd leave. If or when he'd die.

Will slept in fits and starts, chasing sleep in bouts, and he woke up feeling closed and hot. His jaw ached like he slept with his mouth open or had been grinding his teeth all night. It was a swollen pain reminiscent of childhood toothache. It felt different. He ran his tongue along the backs of his teeth, and nearly cut himself on the pointed canines that now resided either side.

It's not like he hadn't expected it.

The transition from living to dead was always graphic and unnecessarily disgusting, but at least it didn't have to be sad. It certainly wasn't lonely. Hannibal helped and aided in Will's sickness, like a stubborn doctor with a failing patient. Clinical, yet oddly attentive.

"Why are you doing this?" Will said, half-lidded, and unsure of what exactly he was asking. Why help? Why choose him? Why *stay?*

"Why do any of us do anything?" He didn't have the capacity for thought to ponder on the philosophies and rhetorics that could come from that response, let alone the strength.

"That... doesn't answer my question."

"I don't think you want one, Will. I don't know if you'd believe me if I told you."

He'd noticed a pattern of him ducking honesty in favour of weird vagaries. No one he'd met had ever done that before- it was normally a choice of telling the truth or straight-up lying, and he was always able to tell between the two. Will didn't really know how to feel about it all. The prevailing emotion was gratitude.

Once he was up on his feet, kept virile by Hannibal's copious supply of blood he gave him in warm glasses- of which Will didn't want to think about long enough to ask it's source, and he didn't trust him to tell him the truth anyway- they decided they needed to leave. Or, rather, Hannibal decided.

Some easy, selfless excuse of a change of scenery doing a world of good, and they made the week-long trip west to an exponentially larger cut of land that Hannibal called home.

Their intermittent stops en route became less and less populated. Seemingly barren. When they eventually arrived, it was further out into the middle of nowhere than Will had ever ventured. The only bearing he had was that it was downriver of Saint Anthony Falls; a mere drawing of which he'd seen as a child. A scattering of houses too small to be named a town resided somewhere nearby, mainly used as a traveller's inn, all of it bracketed by sloping fields and the thick evergreen forest.

Bucks, and fleeing does, and merchants of furs and animal bones drifted between the pines like spirits. The nights fell warm and clouded, inky. The darkness felt underwater. It was a feral place. Purgatorial.

The house itself looked more like a mansion- either formerly or potentially a plantation, Will couldn't tell, but Hannibal seemed to live entirely alone. Thick white pillars of marble wound around the house, towering white walnut trees interrupting the view of it, two stone stairways leading up. It echoed his European roots. And it was grand. Too grand for Will's liking, with far, *far* too many rooms that could've been withholding the most unspeakable of things, and no one would live long enough to uncover them. Elegant didn't encapsulate it. Refined, perhaps.

It escaped Will's need for it to be defined in one neat word; it simply seemed very-- *Hannibal*. He could feel it as it could feel an emotion from a memory. It was almost like he'd been there before.

In the time it took to travel, their relationship had been forced to grow. Enduring each other's company slowly soothed to accepting it, and short, hostile lines of questioning morphed into somewhat genuine conversation. The tension dissipated. Will found himself enjoying their

interactions, in some, curious, attention-starved way, and the sentiment appeared mutual. Honesty was batted back and forth, unexpected smiles being readily returned, watching when the other didn't seem to be looking. They studied one another, like two mirrors in the dark, until, slowly, reflections emerged.

Will later learned that the arduous journey could've been shortened, mainly by avoiding the intervals of recuperating along the way, but Hannibal had, essentially, humoured him.

Freddie had only just finished her first cigarette moments prior, but wanted another: "What were you? To each other, I mean?"

There was a slight tic on Will's face then, that Freddie almost missed. A kind of smile only to be had in private, "I don't know. Whatever two people in that position would make us."

He'd said that Hannibal avoided answering questions. She wondered if he got that from him.

"It sure seemed to move fast. I don't know if two people in your position would so easily indulge each other the way you two did." She said, angling for a tell or a sigh or a laugh. Insinuating. Will just looked at her, and gave her nothing.

He shrugged with his hands out, eyebrows shooting up, "Maybe." Teasing, "Maybe not."

"He got blood for you." Will didn't fidget like she thought he might, but the angle of his head changed: "Where do you think he got that?"

"Hindsight is twenty-twenty. He gave it to me like wine, or in a flask, and I drank it because I had to. It tasted good."

"Was it from an animal? Or--"

"I didn't ask, and he didn't tell me."

"But you drink-- or, *feed*, from animals, too? Is it exclusive to humans?" Will couldn't tell if she was asking to be accusatory, or out of concern for her safety. He figured if she was so concerned about the latter, she wouldn't have sat back down.

"As long as it's not infected, it's fine." He was going to leave it there, but decided against it, "But, yeah, human's tastes the best."

The dining room, for all intents and purposes, seemed to be a redundant venture, but it was furnished as if it was used the most out of any other room. Dimly lit, the long, dark dining table daring to be ruined by appreciative fingerprints; remaining unscathed, reflecting the candelabra above it. All the furnishings throughout the house were cosmopolitan and artistic in their craft, and it stayed true, with antlered plaques and dark pre-Raphaelite-style paintings to accompany any guests to the table.

When it came time for a meal, they'd sit at opposite ends, and the maid would help Hannibal bring out the food. But not to serve it onto plates. No wine to pour.

Hannibal would eat, but Will couldn't understand why. The food didn't sate anything, not properly. It smelt and tasted delicious, and Will was always starving.

But not for food.

Hannibal pulled out his own chair to sit down, "Have you heard the myth of Diomedes and Glaucus, Will?"

"No." It wasn't exactly permission to speak, but it wouldn't stop him.

"The trade is infamously unfair. The two warriors, friends despite being on opposing sides of war, swap armour." He considered his wine glass, then Will, "But Diomedes gives Glaucus armour made of bronze, in exchange for Glaucus' gold."

"Why would he do that?"

"It is said that Zeus caused Glaucus to lose his wits in order to agree to such a deal." Hannibal supplied, forking a mouthful, "Or he was a fool, in life and in friendship."

Will sighed, looking from his empty plate, to all the steaming meats and dishes before him, up to Hannibal. He was hollowed out by a shadow, a skull or a face depending on which way the light struck him: "Hm. What does that make me?"

That made Hannibal smile, proud and sly, swallowing, "In the symbolism of the metals, or the men that owned them? Yet, that rests on how you view Glaucus: a selfless friend, or god-made fool?"

Will found that Hannibal's mind worked in strange, convoluted ways, and conversations on the metaphysical were more common than anything else. He could be enthralled by it, but most of time he gave nothing but passive interest.

One wrong answer, and he would kill him. Or at least, that's sometimes how it felt.

"I don't think it matters." He said, steadily, not wanting to get into a strenuous discussion whilst so irritably hungry.

"The outcome remains the same." Hannibal conceded plainly, cutting bites. Will could guess what he was trying to get at, most likely that he felt he'd traded gold for bronze, and Will should agree on hunting with him. He'd refused enough times, even though he never directly asked. As intriguing as their relationship was, it didn't particular bother Will if he was disappointing him.

"The townspeople are suspicious of us. Your servants are." He offered, looking out the window as darkness pressed up against it, fireflies hovering acting as the only source of light: "They talk."

"There isn't entirely much to talk about." Hannibal dismissed, raising his fork to his mouth again, "Is there?"

Will turned on him, "They watch us dine off empty plates, and drink from empty glasses." He wanted to illustrate the point by smashing one. He released the knife in his hand.

"They watch *you* do so." Hannibal corrected, amused, his jaw working as he chewed, "But it could be worse, could it not?"

Will could imagine a corpse on the table instead of a feast, dissected down the middle with viscera and flowers and blood spilling out like a vile display of affection. The stench of rotting, clammy meat invading his senses; a smell so real and thick it felt as though he could cut a whole in the air for relief. But he couldn’t.

A fly buzzing around the cooling hunk of flesh on his plate. Maggots. Piercing an eyeball with a fork. He was silenced by the thought of it.

He could smell the blood in the maids neck in the next room and it made his mouth go dry.

By the next night, Will was starved.

So much so, that he could hardly lift the lid to come out of his coffin- he detested that he really did have to sleep in such a cramped space- his brain inside his skull felt as if it had turned to mush, and would soon start to come out of his ears. His stomach felt like a stone pit inside a fruit. He got up anyway, not thinking of anything at all, and walked around the house as a lost child would. The warmth of the night felt airless and solid.

A cold fever blossomed at the base of his neck, and it stung when he found one of the maids laying the table. He could feel her veins pulsing, smell her skin, hear her breath. He knew her name. *Sarah*. And he wished he didn't know- it would've made it easier if he didn't.

Will watched her beyond the doorway, seeing nothing but the prominence of the artery in her neck. And when she finally turned and noticed him, she only stared back. His look must have been indistinguishable to a different kind of desire. Still, she ducked her head, didn't apologise.

Caught, off-kilter, like a top spinning towards the edge of a table.

Possessed by hunger, inhibitions entirely forgotten, his own appetite clawing at the backs of his eyes, Will went to her, and, as if she was expecting a kiss, her arms moved up to his shoulders. But only for her hands on his back to turn to claws when he bit down where her throat met her jaw, and drank.

He felt better. More awake, stronger. His vision cleared, and his pain vanished, and then, with guilt and awareness kicking straight in his gut, he tore himself away from her as she began to fade beneath him, blood on his mouth and chin, gasping. She stumbled away, pushed herself up, and ran. Screaming, high and loud, out of the room then out of the front door, the oak connecting to the wall with a loud crack. Will just watched her go, relieved of his torment but dazed by it, waiting until the white of her dress fled into darkness.

Her screams sounded like a fox calling.

"You should've put her out of her misery." Will jumped at the suddenness of Hannibal's voice behind his head.

He sounded annoyed, but only looked serene, a touch of his pleasure at Will's actions in the lines of his eyes. But his gaze was unnaturally dark.

"Soon the hunger will devour you, Will. You won't be able to let this happen every time." Was the last he said, distracted by the red on Will's lips, until he stepped out into the night. His words lingered with the blood in the air.

It was only minutes before the screams abruptly stopped.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Will tried and failed to focus on praying, or confessing, or whatever kind of one-sided conversation with the Almighty that could cool the burning of his sin. Sickness sweltered in him.

Will isn't taking too kindly to the kill to eat reality of vampirism. Hannibal decides to force the issue.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for getting back to this around the same time 4 YEARS LATER? Time is water through my fingers. But yea, the new AMC show did incite my return to this fic. Also rewatching Fleabag. Also, the incredible idea of what Hannibal would get up to hundreds of years ago really tickles me. Anyway, where were we?

The air in the church smelt of dust, damp, and the musky scent of old carpet. Candlelight flickered up the stone and cast twitching shadows up the stone walls, the light tickling the bottom edges of the stained glass, the night beyond the windows making the holy visages look like frightening strangers. Will could feel the effect of the crucifixion statue on the wall behind him like a coal fire. He looked down at the days-old blood stain on his cuff and the shame stirred in him like smoke.

It had been a week since the incident with the maid, and Will had managed to avoid Hannibal entirely. He'd spent his days in his coffin, barely sleeping between the memories of the maid's screams, and he spent the nights at a church he'd discovered quite close by- a fairly small disused chapel that no longer housed a priest. The rafters above him clicked with bats.

He never had any affinity for religion, least of all it's vile institutions, but the building was quiet and the idea of God was a sweet comfort, like a warm anaesthetic for a dying dog. It was convenient that it had proved to be the only place he could safely hide from people. It was peaceful. The hunger had made him weak and sickly. He had been hoping that the prayer would begin to comfort him, and his pious behaviour would earn him some kind of favour if an empathic God did exist, and he were to finally die. He remained conflicted on whether or not that was his desire.

One evening, rendered utterly delirious from the hunger, he felt so violently ill he'd assumed he'd lost consciousness with the way his vision had darkened and skin flashed hot. It was like someone had turned up his temperature all at once. The ground swam in front of him. He woke up from the near black-out state with something warm and frighteningly hairy caught squirming in his mouth. He could taste blood but it was vile and sticky, cloying in his throat, a rancid, bitter flavour like dirtied pocket coins and stomach bile. He coughed, sputtered, looked down at the wet thing in his hands to find he'd killed a rat, the creature still wriggling limply, suffering, oozing red rivulets down his forearms, before squeaking out a final noise and dying. Not quite awake, Will put it down on the floor in front of him as if placing down a ritual object with his shaking hands, and tried to not immediately heave up whatever disgusting form of sustenance he'd managed to drink. He hated it more that it managed to make him feel better. It's corpse had since encouraged ants and he'd shamefully covered it with a chalice cloth. The smell of it's decay was barely noticeable.

Between attempting a meditative state and battling delirium, he stared at melting wax and found it near impossible to think of anything but Hannibal. Their connection made little sense to him, even less with his fever-starved brain. As much as he was intrigued by him, even uncomfortably grateful for his gift and his accomodation, he also felt hatred. So tangible that it seemed as though it would present itself as a physical effect, come off of him in waves. At the very least, that felt familiar to him. It was nice for it to be hatred projected outwards instead of in.

All his feelings had been left to stew like a pit of maggots in his bowels. Scorn, affection, anxiety. He saw Hannibal's eyes in the torn paintings of the messiah, and bleakly thought of Prometheus' fate when the pain of starvation burned his guts like a there was something parasitic inside him digging to burst out. Eating him alive. He had hallucinations of Hannibal lurking in the entryway, needlepoints of glowing white eyes on a tall faceless figure. He heard his voice in the draft.

He sat there, dazed. He felt like he was in a room being flooded with hot boiling water.

The doors behind him clamoured, feet shuffling, and the smell of iron in the air, and a woman dressed in black crossed herself before sitting six rows in front of him. Her blood pulsed within her. He closed his eyes to avert himself from staring. His hands started shaking again, and he sighed, his withering body feeling like something that no longer belonged to him, like an animal.

The candles danced with the breath of the building. It had been unendingly quiet, and now a steady and dull heartbeat drummed against the walls, echoed in the space behind his eyes. Will tried and failed to focus on praying, or confessing, or whatever kind of one-sided conversation with the Almighty that could cool the burning of his sin. Sickness sweltered in him.

Holy places often housed a feeling of being in company. Supernatural and inexplicable. The type of presence that is mistaken for God.

"Do you seek absolution, Will?" Hannibal whispered, his voice as soft and as dark as the shadows. The speed and grace with which he appeared next to him didn't even disturb the

candle flames. It seemed Will's success in avoiding him had only been a passing kindness: "Or do you come here to punish yourself with the pain of the rood cross?"

Will didn't open his eyes, "I don't want you here."

"Convening with Christ only breeds shame in the silence that follows. You don't need to encourage the action."

"Because I do that perfectly well on my own?"

"This is not atonement. Divinity has no place in your condemnation, Will. Your suffering is self-inflicted."

Will opened his eyes but didn't look at him. He knew this wasn't another hallucination because he could smell him so fervently, musky and alluring. He smelt good. It didn't help the nausea: "*You* inflicted my suffering."

"I inflicted the *cure*." He leaned closer in, breath on Will's ear, voice low, "You are rejecting the treatment."

Will tore away from him then, abruptly, stood awkwardly in the middle of the nave and righted himself. The sudden movement had startled the grieving woman and drawn her gaze, and when he locked eyes with her wide, alarmed stare he could hear her heartbeat louder in his ears like it was his own, and saliva pooled in his mouth. He looked back at Hannibal to find him looking at up him, intimidating and impassive, vaguely curious. He didn't consider Hannibal's vague impatience. Fever rising unfathomably higher, he turned with the imbalance caused by nauseous hunger, stumbled, and hurried to leave. A few more steps and his body retched, one of his hands clapped over his mouth and the other caught himself on the nearest pew.

"Are you okay, mister?" Her voice called after him, and he breathed hard through the sweet and engulfing stench of blood. Out of nowhere, Hannibal's hand fixed itself hard on his shoulder.

"He is unwell." Hannibal supplied, as Will groaned in pain, doubling over at the agony of his decaying organs, hearing the rapid and nervous approach of her footsteps, "He feels his recovery is contingent on his reverence."

"Is there no cure?"

"Yes. But God may enact a miracle." Hannibal offered, sarcasm lost on her, his hand holding Will there so tightly he couldn't move to escape her stifling proximity: "What's your name?"

"Eleanor, sir."

"Eleanor," He said it like a term of endearment, "Do you believe his piety will be rewarded with deliverance?"

"Stop—" Will barely even whispered, weak and unheard, his body shaking with an unknown sensation, stomach pain like a cluster of stab wounds, his head feeling as if his skull would

crack open. He feebly clutched at Hannibal, tried to move away, knees trembling to buckle.

“If God deems him worthy.” She offered, “But God gives us the power of knowledge to help the sick. He should see a doctor.”

“I am a doctor.” Hannibal’s hand moved to his chest, halting him completely from his weak attempts at pushing past him, “Do you wish to help him?”

“Well, I can only offer my blessing. A prayer, perhaps?”

Will’s vision had begun to escape his control. He grabbed onto Hannibal’s arm.

“A beautiful idea.”

“Sir? Is that okay with you?”

He had gone eerily still. He was breathing hard, panting.

“Sir?” In the same moment she reached out, Hannibal stepped back, and Will moved.

A blur of movement and the hard quick thud of an impact on stone.

All the candles in the room went out.

For a long drawn-out moment, there were the distinct sounds of sticky wetness and swallowing and breathing in the dark.

Hannibal approached and all the candles softly reignited. An illuminated pool of blood amassed beneath the woman wheezing at the altar steps. Will’s bloodied hand marred the floor as he drank, hunched over like an animal on quarry. Hannibal stepped over her arm when she reached to him in a final desperate act of survival, before she went silent.

Even in the firelight, her skin paled with death.

Hannibal turned from the altar to look down at Will, beastly and enchanting, and put his hands in his pockets. It was fascinating to watch him finally feed, his posture crouched over her doglike, the ripe sweetness of the gore permeating the air like a pungent heat source. He thought of being the one underneath him. He then thought, more apathetically, about methods of directly inciting deadly encounters.

If Will kept refusing to feed to the point of starvation, it may prove useful in wearing down his morality through violent extremes considering how it forced his instincts. Would he have starved to death alone in this rotting little chapel? Would he have killed her anyway, if Hannibal hadn’t have been there? Could he be pushed to more extravagant means of killing? Hannibal wasn’t yet impatient at Will’s upstanding need for morality and goodness, but had considered his stubbornness to be a passing concern. Perhaps it would linger longer than he had hoped.

He hoped his interest in Will would last longer than his patience.

In any case, for now, Will was a lockbox of potential. The possibilities excited him. Considering how long he'd been observing Will, in his grief and pain and drunkenness of his old life, he had anticipated that condition to seep into his new life. The triviality of his ethical concerns made sense with his apparent need for, from what Hannibal could tell, incessant self-flagellation. He often read shame as a synonym for pitiful. He kept having to remind himself that Will was still new, and young, and beautiful- when he wasn't so sickly, thinner and wanner in such a way, almost waxy. Death looked good on him, but he couldn't tell if sickness did.

Perhaps he'd fallen for the enigma of him. Perhaps he will go on to prove himself weak in body and in mind. But Hannibal had to believe that it would all be worth it. That Will would be worth it. At the very least, he hadn't appeared to be scared of Hannibal thus far, and that in itself was a rarity. He listened to Will feed and considered how far he could push him, and what those results would look like.

"If I'd have known you to be religious, Will, I would've disguised myself as a priest." The idea still interested him anyway, with memories of Salem from almost a century prior, "Would you be happier taking blood from a chalice at communion, the way Christ intended?" He was practically speaking to dead air with the way Will was hardly aware of his surroundings. It was still a lovely image.

Will's pupils were blown, void in his eyes, his inner void being filled with how he drained all living colour from the dead girl, closed his eyes. Hannibal abstractedly thought of all of her organs losing their pigment. He watched the slow way reality came back to him, as if watching him wake up from sleep, as his eyes rolled open and his right hand brushed blood across the floor. He flinched back from her then, gasped breaths, deep red obscuring his face and mouth. He twitched at the scene before him, sat back on his knees, breathing hard. His eyes clicked up and locked on Hannibal like he'd only just noticed he was in the room.

Hannibal, the sharp planes of his face shifting in the candlelight, tilted his head in acknowledgement, or curiosity, like a vulture.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

> *Energy surged in him as if Hannibal's close attention was a matchstick to his spinal column, blood singing brightly within him.*
>
> Will has to reconcile his actions with his morality. Hannibal isn't much help.

The sheer liberation of his starved bodily symptoms felt a lot like an abrupt end to a paralysing virus- his senses so alert it felt like he could feel the light as a sensation like water. Smells in the air burned at him, the shadows slackened into the corners of the room humming with an unknown presence, the blood and skin between his teeth caught like meat gristle. It was like waking up from a drowning nightmare. He swallowed. Swallowed again. His skin prickled. He met Hannibal's eyes again, white and bright in the semi-dark like glinting lights. Energy surged in him as if Hannibal's close attention was a matchstick to his spinal column, blood singing brightly within him.

Feeling so physically empowered and alive felt sharp and wrong in contrast to how his mind whirred to catch up to his actions. He looked back down at the woman, the puddle of red surrounding her so dark it was almost black, avoided looking at her face turned up and away, eyes setting on the shadowy cavern of her ravished throat. The black lace of her dress and her grey skin cast warm by the flickering light. Everything sprawled, laid open. Her blood cloying on his tongue.

He wanted to feel guilt. He wanted to feel fear and grief and reproach. He breathed deeply, tried to control the new pounding of his heart, brain sparkling. He felt relief. He felt good. That invoked a reaction in his gut not unlike guilt, but lacking the sincerity. He felt monstrous. Powerful.

"Are you going to pray for redemption, Will?"

Hannibal, hands in his pockets not mitigating how intimidating he stood tall in front of him, stared, waited for him to talk. Will glared up at him, finally settled on anger: "What have you done to me?"

The deep timbre of his voice took up the space in the room, his tone of furious resignation like music in the air. Hannibal, strangely, relaxed, "Consider your actions to be like that of a hunter. Do you feel victorious in the afterglow, or is your human righteousness clouding your judgement?" A thick wave of hatred radiated off Will so palpably Hannibal expected to look down and see it pooling like the blood at his feet, "You are not human anymore, Will. You sacrificed that. Humans are now prey, to be hunted for sport, and for purpose."

“And you expect me to take to it? Kill without thought?”

“I expect you to adapt.”

“You did this.”

“God doesn’t create your shame, then. Did it feel good?”

Will couldn’t form the response. He breathed out, slumped over a little, Hannibal’s unknowable stare hard like a physical weight, “You did this.” He repeated, “Every violent act I commit is in your stead.”

A pause, like he was pleased with the answer, “Perhaps.” He half-expected Hannibal to shrug, and he paced languidly, looking back at the altar, at the windows. He could hear that familiar smug smile in his words, “Killing doesn’t weigh on my conscience. If God has to count my sins, I’m sure it will keep him busy.”

Will sighed like it had been forced out of him, kneeling before his kill, kneeling for Hannibal before God, like a sacrament. His emotions bubbled into steam, into despair, “What if I can’t do this?”

Hannibal paused long enough for Will to get a sneaking feeling that he was in danger. Then turned to look down at him, “We have time.”

The burst of satiated energy had turned over to tiredness much like a carnivore after a big meal, the sky outside beginning to vaguely lighten. Will couldn’t look at the body anymore. The light burned his eyes like a photo that had been overexposed.

“Ah,” Freddie scolded, writing a note, “Photography wasn’t invented until 1826.”

Will stopped, looked at her, “The marvel of recollection is that it allows for embellishment.”

Freddie hummed a little, seeming agreeable, finished her scribbling, clicked her pen, “If that’s true, how much of this is embellishing the truth?”

Brows furrowing, Will gave her different look, something more surprised, “You seem more concerned about those details, than by the fact I’ve recalled murdering someone.”

If anything, she seemed politely offended, “Well, that sorta comes with the territory, doesn’t it? To put it plainly, both vampirism and tabloid journalism…” *Encourage* wouldn’t be amiss, “Accommodate that sort of thing.”

“I guess so.”

She couldn’t tell if Will was displeased by her unbothered attitude towards it all, or she was projecting the version of him from hundreds of years ago. If he had been killing people for more than a couple of centuries now, like a sport no less, the first thing she thought was that she enjoyed being chosen. She was proud of it. That thought was quickly sullied by the idea that milk-washed show pigs probably felt that same pride.

“Inconsistencies such as these are hairline fractures. Too many and the story comes apart.”

Will didn’t like her tone, “I wasn’t claiming any facts. It’s a lens of modernity. Even so, if history is all stories, how would you go about proving me wrong?”

“Isn’t your recollection skewed by however you feel now? How can you remember something so accurately from over two hundred years ago?”

“My mind works differently to yours.”

“How so?”

Will smiled, passably, and didn’t answer that. He sighed like she’d said something to disappoint him, “Are we to argue theories of subjective experience and cognitive bias?”

Freddie shirked that off, in too deep anyway, “Okay. If everything you’re saying is the truth, how would *you* even know? Were you wilfully turned or not? Did the candles actually change? Did he hold you in place?” She shrugged, gestured at his lack of response, noted other things down, “I mean: surely you knew what you were getting into? But why is this all a matter of culpability, anyway?”

It was a clever way of asking if the whole session was a lost bet, like he had a point to win in an argument- as if exoneration from guilt changed anything at all. Will’s face didn’t change much, “I’m giving you my story. There are plenty of sides to it. I can only give you my own.”

“But why? Where’s this actually going? We’ll be here for weeks at this rate.”

Will, rather apathetically, suggested: “Would it be wise to schedule appointments? Only at night, I’m afraid. And traffic permitting.” Freddie hesitated, stuttered.

“Okay. Yes.”

“Have somewhere to be in the morning?”

“No.”

“Good. Then, stay. The less you interrupt me, the less time this will take.” He looked scarier when his tone sharpened like that, “Let the story seduce you.” His look darkened, something mournful, “As I was.” Freddie, silenced, swallowed around nothing and flicked onto a new notebook page.

The church feeling much colder, Will, only slightly shakily, stood up. The blood on his hands and face, down the front of his suit, his eyes dark, hair wild. Hannibal was barely illuminated by the candlelight, and he stared at Will until he relented his anger in the sigh of his shoulders, blinked a surrender, like Hannibal’s intensity was a pressing force.

Hannibal, unwavering in his stare, rounded the corpse between them, slowly but not cautiously. He came to stand next to Will, shoulder to shoulder, facing the opposite direction, and Will turned his head slightly, shy to meet his eyes so close: “You look…” He raised a hand and touched a thumb to Will’s lower lip, felt the warmth of his breath and the blood, the

touch so fleeting, like a transgression. The hand lingered by his face as if he'd cup his cheek, but he retracted it. It was like he was scared of touching him, like it would set him on fire. Will carefully met his gaze, and found it stifling, "Radiant."

Will's eyes were soft, reflecting candlelight. Hannibal's eyes were engulfing. In a rush, the tension left with Hannibal, there one moment and gone in a blink, and Will felt, absurdly, like something had been ripped from him.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

It was like he'd found him in the dark in a maze of his own making and was now leading him through it.

Will is plagued by nightmares, but Hannibal has a proposal.

Before the yolky sun broke in the pink dawn sky, Will returned home. The smell of pollen and damp earth was pungent in the air, the dew on the long grass wetting his shoes and legs of his trousers. The thick curtains were drawn and the house was as cold as the outside air when he entered. The blood on his face and hands had dried itchy. He stripped in the chill air and used a cold pitcher of water to scrub himself clean.

He had yet to get used to the coffin. Hannibal had asked brief questions on his preferences for the design in the journey across state lines, and Will had shrugged or grimaced, and ultimately only gave him the guidelines: "Nothing too fancy."

It was black, varnished, no carvings. Silver detailing, a hinged lid with the inside a silken blue interior. Evocative of the depths of the ocean. Hannibal had mentioned something about his eyes when he'd opened it, and Will was surprised to have felt flattery. Simple, no fuss, elegant- he liked it more than he thought he would. Hannibal's, in contrast, was a grand lacquered casket, only slightly bigger, hand-carved on all sides with baroque murals that looked to be of battles or stories; Will hadn't asked. Its dark wood finish glistened in the firelight, its interior all swathes of red, like the inside of an animal. Before, it had been something more European, lined with fur; before that, an Italian Renaissance box much like a cassone, decorated with paintings, and even before that, stone. Always characteristically extravagant and suitable with his aesthetic.

They kept them, side by side, in a room concealed by a false bookcase within the master bedroom. He considered the implication of the king-sized bed in their room, felt heat in his face, and wondered if that was the intention. The aesthetics of the mansion were as esoteric as expected from the time period, simple and clean and suspiciously modest. Strangely, their coffins seemed fitting.

It was a blessing that he wasn't claustrophobic. Still, his sleep had been restless, and plagued with night terrors.

He dreamed that night of feeling the warmth of a wound on his body and not finding any blood.

“Are the nightmares still persisting?” Was how Hannibal greeted him upon finding him in a new room of the house during mealtime- Will had hoped to be left to occupy the study alone. It was windowless room with a desk adjacent to a bookcase wall. Two armchairs in front of the desk, a bigger one behind it, and a fireplace behind that. He’d lit the fire, chose one of the armchairs in front of the desk, and found himself an early edition of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* amongst the hoards of books in foreign languages he mostly didn’t recognise. Some french, some spanish. Some delicate as if ancient- probably were. The shelves were clean of dust.

“My sleep has never been restful.” He always got up before Hannibal, so, rather ashamedly, he’d hoped he wouldn’t notice, or at least wouldn’t comment. Will was beginning to understand that Hannibal rarely enacted even small mercies, “So much for sleeping like the dead.”

“We are not dead. And we are undying. That is perhaps the problem.” Hannibal rounded the desk and barely bent to drop a small log into the hearth: “It can often take time for the body and mind to adjust to sleep in our states, considering it is like playacting a corpse.”

Will only looked up at him when he had his back turned to watch the flames, firelight licking at his face and neck, his hand curled over the back of the chair, the elegant curve of his posture. He was wearing one of his ruffle-necked linen shirts, a dark-coloured waistcoat, it made him look broad yet slim at the waist. Will was still in his sleep shirt, a similar blouse, open at the throat. He still smelt like sweat: “This is just another symptom, then?”

“You seem keen to collect symptoms, Will. Your body seems intent on avoiding what your mind would prefer you to do with it.”

He stared hard at the back of his head, wondered if he could feel it like the warmth of the fire in front of him. His gaze dropped back down to the book before Hannibal turned to sit behind the desk, mostly in shadow. Will could feel his gaze like heat. He turned a page, “So you think I want to be dead?”

There was a pause of Hannibal looking at him and Will fixedly looking at his book without reading. Hannibal simply said: “Don’t you?” Will’s expression shuttered, fighting the urge to glare at him, his eyes moving to stare down at the rug, “You don’t seem interested in sustaining yourself.”

“It doesn’t feel sustainable.”

“Killing to feed, or being undead?”

Will frowned, half-shrugged, “Both.”

“Both are synonymous.” Hannibal agreed, voice low, “Both are also dependent on you shedding your human propriety. Sooner rather than later.”

Will sighed, his vision lost to the swirling fire-lit patterns of the carpet, red and cream, blood and flesh. The whimpering breath of the woman dying beneath him whispered amongst the smoke, “*Later* harbouring the threat that you’ll kill me if I don’t?”

“Yes.” Will’s eyes snapped to him then.

Burning. Will felt himself burning.

Hannibal’s expression remained serene, but his reddish eyes were unfathomably dark. There was still some softness in his regard, something like amusement, and he inclined his head as if assessing: “It would be a mercy. I wouldn’t allow you to suffer starvation.” He said it as though it was meant to bring relief. And as though Will would believe it.

“I’ve already suffered starvation.”

“Did you enjoy it?”

“No.”

“Sooner, then.” He opened the closest drawer and placed a crystal decanter on the desk. It contained a dark liquid, either wine or whiskey. With the way Will’s eyes landed on it, he seemed to acquiesce, “When I told you regular food and drink will not truly satisfy, I admit that it does not necessarily pertain to alcohol.“

“And you decided that was a good omission. Given my alcoholism.” It wasn’t a question, as Will’s observations, Hannibal had noted, were usually entirely accurate.

“Yes.”

Will found himself enjoying straight answers from Hannibal. Or at least, just simple affirmatives. So much of him was otherwise obscured. The same as the breadth of Will’s feelings towards him seemed otherwise obscured.

“Why has that changed?”

Hannibal, ever frustratingly mysterious- not even mysterious, more inscrutable- watched the firelight on the crystal instead of Will’s face, allowing Will to watch him: “I’d considered your dependence akin to a child nursing on their own thumb. A final comfort. A desperate coping. Perhaps it would be best to reintroduce you to the concept, given your avoidance of dinner.”

Will hadn’t quite learned that the vast majority of seemingly kind acts from Hannibal- much like the insults hidden in his analysis- were sworded and of dubious intent, but he had seen the pattern. It wasn’t a debt, more of a bargaining. One kind turn deserved another not-so-kind one. He looked down at the poetry about Satan found it a stupidly apt parallel.

For some reason, even after all that he’d done up to that moment, Hannibal had a strange draw to him outside of any conditioning that Will could understand. Even in antagonising him, in the big and small gestures, it felt absurdly like Hannibal continued to know his mind more easily than Will could navigate it. It was like he’d found him in the dark in a maze of his own making and was now leading him through it.

Will, finally, closed the book.

“My avoidance was of you. My aversion to food is symptomatic of that.”

“Do you wish to eat?”

He’d tried an apple out of curiosity and it had tasted as if he was holding his nose whilst eating it, and didn’t do anything to help his hunger. He found it disturbing to eat without the resultant satiation, and figured it was even more pointless if there was no satisfaction in the taste: “It doesn’t do much. Why bother?”

“Let food be thy medicine, and medicine be thy food. It may help your want for normalcy.” Will found that to be a pretty stupid deduction.

“You think I would’ve let you change me, if I wanted normalcy?” That seemed to please Hannibal, and elicit a response that seemed to be the closest thing he could get to catching him off guard.

“Regularity, then. This is a time of transition. Isolation and deprivation are your enemies.”

“They’ve never been my enemies.” In fact, isolation continued to be Will’s solace, however damaging, even if he was going off to hide to die like a wounded cat, being alone was the most comfortable thing he could be. *Solitude sometimes is best society*. He could recognise the same was probably true of Hannibal: “You seem overly invested in preventing my death, having already caused it before now.”

“I feel responsibility—”

“No.” Will finally broke his mask to scoff, “Spare me the formalities of lying. You have your reasons. This may as well be a trial run until the novelty expires, and I may as well’ve died in that church.” The fire cracked in the hearth. Hannibal looked nothing but enamoured by his honesty.

There was a pause from Hannibal, studying him intently, and Will, surprisingly, didn’t break the eye contact, resolute in his knowing. There was something in his eyes again, something glinting: “Would you allow me to cook for you?”

When Will did actually attend mealtimes, he waved off the maids attempts to give him food. He knew it was impolite, and that Hannibal was displeased by it. He hadn’t seen where the food had come from. He hadn’t even met the kitchen staff. Hannibal had previously mentioned he enjoyed cooking, but Will hadn’t thought that he fed himself- he seemed too rich to be doing so. It was presented as if it was safe by association, like he didn’t want to reveal the intensity of his need to control.

It being presented as an offer seemed both manipulative and submissive from Hannibal, but neither implication really surprised Will. Even with all the overtures of care and attention, and the seeming control Hannibal wielded- like maker and creation, master and prodigy- Will had considered how easy it would be to hurt him. How he would probably let him do so, and he would enjoy it. Will would enjoy it, too. All the provocation had to be driving him to *something*. He hadn’t considered that there were things to be done about it other than violence.

Even so, if Will denied him, he thought it would be another nail in his actual foreseen coffin, and he wanted a break from suffering, least of all in Hannibal's presence. He could at least try to return to being amicable, "Fine." If not amicable, he could easily seek revenge, "When?"

Hannibal rose from his seat, picked up the decanter to take with him: "No time like the present."

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